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ABSTRACT

In addressing the problems faced by compensatory education programs in getting financially and academically disadvantaged students through postsecondary education, this paper explores three common myths about schools and schooling: (1) academic success is highly correlated to intelligence; (2) families of these students are not supportive of education; and (3) no one has ever attempted to teach these students. Citations from research done in each of these areas are used to illustrate the lack of substantial support for each of the statements. It is argued that there is yet no clear understanding of the causes and remedies for the deficits in traditional learning activities that the poor sustain, though the barriers are real and well-documented. It is also argued that the current large-scale efforts of compensatory educational programs cannot adequately encompass the distinctive needs of these students. It is suggested that some answers might be found in the affective domain. Questions concerning the elements of affective compensatory education and the implications of these elements for different aspects of higher education are proposed. (Author/EB)

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Cognitive Dissonance and the Affective Domain in Collegiate Compensatory Education

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The overall objective of collegiate compensatory education programs is to get the financially and academically disadvantaged students through post-secondary education.

Thus begins the problem. Before we can address the problem, three common myths about schools and schooling must be explored:

I. Academic success is highly correlated to intelligence.

II. Families of these students are not supportive of education.

III. No one has ever attempted to teach these students; Poor schools and schooling.

I. Academic success and intelligence.

Christopher Jencks[1] is quite correct when he states that the term "intelligence" is so loaded with moral and political overtones that it is almost impossible to conduct a rational discussion once it has been introduced. This is to say that the entire notion of what is intelligence as opposed to what is not is highly debatable. Further more, the relationship between test scores and school grades is far from perfect.[2]

The variables besides performance are vast. Many teachers deliberately try to reward effort rather than ability. Then too, there exists the phenomenon of teacher expectation, Robert Rosenthal and Lenore Jacobson and many others have documented how the teacher's expectation for the student's behavior could come to serve as a self-fulfilling prophecy.[3] Finally, even when grades depend entirely on performance, an able student may do poorly because he has not done the assigned work, while a dull student may do well because he has been unusually diligent. Instead of intelligence being used as a yardstick for measuring school achievement, this paper hopes to demonstrate that success--academic--or otherwise is more dependent upon attitudes and values than intelligence.

II Poor families are not supportive of education.

Historically in America it has been assumed by all groups that education was the chief tool for social mobility. E. Franklin Frazier gives some clue to the "myth of education for Blacks." Frazier cites how one could see Blacks immediately after Emancipation holding their "blue-black spellers" with one hand while they guided the plow with the other because "education meant ultimate freedom"[4]. Later he shows college educated Blacks working in the post office sorting mail and in poorly paid teaching positions in segregated schools.[5] Abram Kardiner and Lionel Ovesey when commenting on the attitude of descendants of this dispirited group toward education state:

> The resistance to education of the lower-class children becomes enormous. There are three dominant reasons for this: first, Negro children in this group understandably fail to see the relevance of education to their opportunities in life; second, many are obliged to work half or full time; and third, the competition of street life with the school is too great, and the street, with its imitation of the struggle for existence, with its sexual opportunities, and those for adventure, generally wins. From this time on, school becomes a meaningless and unrewarding bore. This is equally true of both sexes. It is difficult to conceive of a more hopeless and dispirited group than a high school class of Negro adolescent girls; nor a more bored and resentful group than a high school class of Negro boys. Both seem equally aimless and befogged.[6]

Yet most of the data indicate that lower income youth and their parents have high educational aspirations which are not carried through to achievement levels. The problem does not seem to be, as some have suggested, one of insufficiently high levels of aspiration, but one of realizing these aspirations through productive behavior. Alvin F. Poussaint and Carolyn Atkinson cite the strict verbal rules and regulations that typical lower income mothers set down for scholastic achievement and behavior, but they do not do enough to guide and encourage the children's efforts at verbal-symbolic mastery. Therefore, the child learns only to verbalize standards of academic interest and attainment. Thus the low income, low achieving student learns to use expressions of interest and ambition as a verbal substitute for behaviors he is unable to

enact.[7]

III. No one has ever really attempted to teach low income students: Poor schools and schooling.

Since early in 1964, the nation has spent vast sums of educational dollars in programs for poor, disadvantaged, economically deprived American children. Many of the names of these programs are household words - Head Start, Follow Through, Upward Bound and Special Services for Disadvantaged Students. Yet despite these costly programs to compensate for these disadvantages the data indicate that these programs are failing. In fact it seems that today everybody is labeling compensatory education a failure. A cursory glance at the literature might lead one to suspect that these critics are white--generally they are. It would be easy to say--and equally cursory--that these whites do not want these programs to work since they would end poverty and thus ruin the obvious financial gains that are made by big business and big politics off the unfortunate plight of the poor. However, all the critics are not white. In fact, not all of the critics say that the programs do not work. Some Black critics say that they do work and that is what's wrong with them. Thomas S. Gunnings, in an article titled "Psychological, Educational and Economic Effects of Compensatory Education Programs on Blacks" is one such critic:

> Schizophrenia, while it takes many forms, is a manifestation of of social as well as individual disorders. A child in these compensatory programs is constantly compelled to change not only his behavior but also his basic personality as he is shifted back and forth between school environment and home environment. Each place demands markedly different behavior from him. The child must be careful to display all the rigid traits in the right place. For example, if he attempts to use impeccable manners and speech at home, he immediately becomes a threat to his siblings. He is ridiculed and made to feel that he does not fit into the family structure. In school, if he uses the slang language of the street, he is quickly correctd and he begins to withdraw and becomes afraid to articulate his ideas for fear of embarrassment and rejection. Suddenly, the child does not belong anywhere--not at home, not in school.[9]

Of course, that point has been made elsewhere. Samule Yette, states that the "purpose of such programs (compensatory) is to make Black students white."[10] If credentials give statements substance, then Dr. Gunnings, visiting scientist

for the American Psychological Association and past Coordinator for the Association of Black Psychologists and Samuel Yette, prize-winning newsman give the argument some weight.

It seems then that there is a paradox: Compensatory education programs don't work (i.e. the students have a high attrition rate and low grade point averages) as the recent G.A.O. study on Upward Bound indicates. Or they do work (i.e. the students learn to speak standard American English and take on Middle Class American ideals). In either case, the student seems to be lost, In the former he just doesn't seem to be able to meet the standards regardless of the money spent and in the latter he is successful and no longer continues to be "Black". Neither case is acceptable since both are "failures."

It would then seem that the easy answers for the present failures of these programs, i.e., low intelligence of the students, non-caring parents, or poor schools and schooling are based upon the myths discussed in the early part of this paper. It is the opinion of this writer that the cognitive difficulty experienced by these students is in fact "cognitive dissonance."[11] This occurs when an individual's actions are the opposite of how he or she feels or thinks, producing a feeling of inner conflict. This suggests that the student will act in ways which he or she thinks are consistent with the ways in which he seems himself; if he doesn't, a state of internal "cognitive dissonance" will result which is undesirable and uncomfortable. This leads him to take action to achieve a state of harmony consistent with the view that he has of himself.[12] In short, the phenomenon of school with its expectations collides head on with the values, attitudes and processes of the lower income student. The importance of the affective domain is well documented[13], however the relationship between cognitive dissonance and the affective domain needs further exploration.

To begin this exploration we must look at the social milieu from which the financially disadvantaged student comes. Edward C. Banfield sees the lower classes as having a radically present orientation towards life:

Those suggestions are excellent for longitudinal studies that may one day produce criteria for student selection, but at present the results of such testing cannot be used to exclude a student from program participation. Although the Special Services to Disadvantaged Students program ask that their compensatory education programs "Develop and utilize procedures to identify and select eligible students"[22] they, correctly, would not allow the results of affective testing to be used as the sole criteria for denying a student admission to the program. One need only give a cursory glance at the literature to realize the present controversy on the testing of low income students.[23] However, as soon as a high degree of correlation is established between student performance on these affective instruments, and cognitive achievement, these instruments may prove to be highly useful in the difficult areas of student selection in compensatory education.

Such correlations have not yet been established. What has been established by this extensive "needs assessment" is that a significant number of disadvantaged students vary sufficiently from the norm that they may benefit from an affective curriculum.

The question then becomes what are the elements of an affective curriculum? This writer while reviewing the literature on affective curriculum in collegiate compensatory education found affective education to be in a confused state due to philosophical polarity, the lack of agreement on definition, and the lack of measures, strategies and vocabulary to conduct evaluation with consistency.[24] However, it is becoming quite clear that compensatory programs built upon traditional cognitive models, i.e. remedial math, English, note taking skills, etc. are not doing the job:

> Special Services Programs have been developed quickly over the country, and on many campuses along most traditional lines. Many programs, therefore, are neither creative nor innovative but are merely variations of preexisting practices. Federally funded Special Services Programs have a unique opportunity and responsibility to break new ground. They should develop new instructional approaches and stragegies, and new forms of intervention designed to help the disadvantaged student cope successfully with problems

of identity and adjustment to campus life, rather than rely solely on traditional practices designed to salvage regular students who flounder.[25]

Thus Davis, Burkheimer and Borders-Patterson summarize the literature with the following statement:

> The state of the art of research on the disadvantaged in higher education would seem still to be in the infancy stage. There is yet no clear understanding of the causes and remedies for the deficits in traditional learning activities that the poor sustain, though the barriers are real and well documented. Current large-scale efforts consist of intensive application of packages of traditional vehicles--counseling, tutoring, remediation, etc.--though with a growing awareness that the target group has distinctive needs and responses that an educational psychology and instructional system based on the majority population cannot yet adequately encompass.[26]

It would seem then, that some answers might be found in the affective domain.

What then, are the questions that the affective domain might answer. This investigation proposes no answers, but it does propose some questions, the answer to which may move compensatory education in higher education from its present stolid position:

1. What are, or should be, the elements of affective compensatory education?
2. What are the implications of these elements for
   a. Staff development?
   b. Program development?
   c. Curriculum development?
   d. Program evaluation?
3. How can the language of affect be standardized?
4. What is the role of affect in compensatory education in higher education?

These questions must be answered if the work is to proceed and students are to be helped through higher education. The answers to question one would move the discussion of the affective domain from a sole concern with "improvement" of student values, attitudes and processes to a greater concern for understanding the phenomenon. This work could

help practitioners to "see" the components and thereby to know whose functions or tasks are being asked of whom.

Question two would deal with the attainability of an affective curriculum, viz., what it should provide, and what it can accomplish. This would also supply models for badly needed in-service training for staff and faculty.

Question three would deal with the lack of agreement of definition in affective education. This work would clarify discourse and aid in precision and ultimately resolve presently unanswered issues.

Question four would deal with the psycho-social implications of affect. If it is true that higher education simply "middle classifies" lower income students--and there are data to support that posture--should compensatory education not be looked upon as societal intervention rather than education? And if that is the case, should the work be continued?

> The Lower Class. At the present-oriented end of the scale, the lower-class individual lives for the moment. If he has any awareness of a future, it is of something fixed, fated, beyond his control: things happen to him, he does not make them happen. Impulse governs his behavior, either because he cannot discipline himself to sacrifice a present for a future satisfaction or because he has no sense of the future. He is therefore radically improvident: Whatever he cannot use immediately he considers valueless. His bodily needs (especially for sex) and his taste for "action" take precedence over everything else - and certainly over any work routine. He works only as he must to stay alive, and drifts from one unskilled job to another, taking no interest in his work.[14]

Banfield suggests that the attitude and motivations which have been found associated with pupils' achievement (or lack of it) are related to the time horizons of the class, the class cultures. One would expect a present-oriented person not to have as much sense of control over his environment as a future-oriented one, for example; similarly one would expect him to be more likely to trust "luck" rather than "hard work".[15]

If Banfield is correct, there would seem to be a fundamental incompatibility between the outlook of the financially disadvantaged pupil who is present-oriented, and that of the school which is "an institution where every item in the present is finely linked to a distant future",[16] and in consequence there is a serious clash of expectations between the school and the lower income student.

In an earlier paper[17] this writer presented a tentative framework for identifying certain selected affective variables that may be helpful in recruitment of low income, academically disadvantaged students:

> A part of the student's assessment should include his performance on certain attitudinal scales. Brown[18] has a scale which purports to assess the student's attitude toward school. Does he like being confined to the classroom? Can he tolerate the "objective, scholarly," mode of teaching? This, of course, is the lecture method so commonly employed throughout the institution. Rokeach[19] has devised a scale that purports to measure dogmatism. How flexible is the student? How does he react to a novel situation? This is so important because generally higher education is extremely novel to the average poor student. Rotter[20] has a scale that purports to measure locus of control. Who does the student perceive is the controlling factor in his life? Is he in control or is it chance, luck--or the professor? Does he perceive that he can control, even manipulate the institution if he but manipulates his own behavior.

FOOTNOTES

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4. E. Franklin Frazier. Black Bourgeoisie. Glenco Illinois: Free Press 1975. p. 62.

5. Ibid. p. 83.

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7. Alvin Pouissant and Carolyn Atkinson. "Black Youth and Motivation", The Black Scholar. Vol. 1, No.5. pp 43-51.

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21. Cavin op. cit. p. 15.

22. Federal Register. Part III, "Proposed Rules." U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, December 16, 1975.

23. Edward Barnes "Cultural Retardation or Shortcomings of Assessment Techniques?" paper presented at the annual convention of the Council on Exceptional Children, Denver, Colorado, April 1969.

24. Alonzo Cavin. An Examination of Affective Curricular Elements in Collegiate Compensatory Education. Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, Temple University, 1979, p. 6.

25. Junius A. Davis, Graham Burkheimer and Anne Borders-Patterson, The Impact of Special Service Programs in Higher Education for "Disadvantaged" Students, Princeton: Educational Testing Service, 1975, pp. 2-28.

26. Ibid, pp 26-27.